

THE FOUNDING OF SINGAPORE.

[THIS INTERESTING LETTER OF SIR T. S. RAFFLES HAS BEEN KINDLY PLACED AT THE DISPOSAL OF THE STRAITS ASIATIC SOCIETY BY THE CHAIRMAN OF THE RAFFLES LIBRARY AND MUSEUM COMMITTEE, WITH THE FOLLOWING EXPLANATION.

Singapore, 3rd December, 1878.

Sir,

I was requested when leaving England, by my friend Mr. T. Durman, formerly Commissioner of Police, Straits Settlements, to take charge of the enclosed most interesting letter from Sir Stamford Raffles to Colonel Addenbrooke, dated Singapore the 10th June 1819, and to offer it to the Raffles Museum here in the name of T. H. Scholefield Esq., of Bournemouth, Devonshire, to whom it belongs.

I have no doubt you will consider the letter, containing as it does the views of the Founder of the Settlement at the time of his taking possession, of sufficient value and interest to provide for its safe-keeping in the Raffles Museum.

I have &c.,

(Signed) W. W. WILLANS.

*The Chairman of
The Committee of Management
of the Raffles Museum.*

Singapore, 10th June, 1819.

My dear Colonel,

You will probably have to consult the Map in order to ascertain from what part of the world this letter is dated. Refer to the extremity of the Malay Peninsula where you will observe several small Islands forming the Straits of Singapore. On one of these are the ruins of the ancient Capital of "Singapura," or "City of the Lion" as it is called by the Malays. Here I have just planted the British Flag, and a more commanding and promising Station for the pro-

tection and improvement of all our interests in this quarter cannot well be conceived. Since my return to this Country my public attention has been chiefly directed to the proceedings of the Hollanders, who, not satisfied with receiving from us the fertile and important Islands of Java and the Moluccas, have attempted to exercise a supremacy over the whole of Borneo and Sumatra, and to exclude our nation from all intercourse with the other States of the Archipelago. They have been very particular in the means, and they seem to have considered the degradation of the English character as necessary to their own Establishment. You may easily conceive how much annoyance this has given to me, and prepared as I was to remain a quiet spectator of all their actions, I have not found it possible to continue entirely neutral. While they confined their proceedings to the Countries in which European authority was established, we had no right to interfere; these we had by Treaty agreed to transfer to them, and they were of course at liberty to act in them as they thought proper without reference to our interests; but they no sooner found themselves possessed of these than they conceived the idea of driving us from the Archipelago altogether, and when I made my re-appearance in these Seas they had actually hardly left us an inch of ground to stand upon. Even our right to the spot on which I write this, though yesterday a wilderness and without inhabitant, is disputed; and, in return for our unparalleled generosity, we are left almost without a resting place in the Archipelago.

But it is not *our* interests alone that have suffered by this unexpected return; those of humanity and civilization suffer more deeply. To comprehend the question justly you must consider that it has always been an object of the first importance to our Indian interests to preserve a free and uninterrupted commerce with these Islands as well on account of this commerce itself, as the safety of our more extensive commerce with China, which lies beyond them; and that for the last century, owing to the defects and radical weakness of the Dutch, we have been able to effect this without serious molestation from them. The consequence of this constant and friendly intercourse has been the establishment of numerous independent States throughout the Archipelago. These have advanced considerably in civilization; and as their knowledge increased so did their wants; and their advancement in civilization might be estimated in the ratio of their commerce. The latter is suddenly arrested by the withering grasp of the Hollander; the first article he insists upon is the exclusion of the English and the mono-

poly on account of his own Government of whatever may be the principal produce of the place; the private merchant is thrust out altogether; or condemned to put up with vexations and impositions but above all the unhealthy climate of Batavia; at which Port alone the Dutch seem determined that all the trade of these Islands shall centre. Surely after the millions that have been sacrificed to this hateful and destructive policy, they ought to have had some common feeling for humanity, some object in view beyond the cold calculations of profit and loss. Let them do what they please with Java and the Moluccas, and these contain a population of at least five millions; but with the population of Borneo, Sumatra and the other Islands, which is at least equal in amount, they can have no right to interfere by restrictive regulation. Let them turn their own lawful subjects to what account they please, but let them not involve our allies, and the British character, in the general vortex of the ruin they are working for themselves.

I must beg your pardon for troubling you with politics, but it is necessary I should give you some account of them to explain the cause of my movements, which have been various and rapid. I had not been six weeks in Bencoolen before it was necessary to penetrate into the interior of the Southern Districts of Sumatra. I had hardly accomplished this when my attention was directed to the Central districts and the original seat of Malayan Empire*; on my return from there I had to send a party across the Island from Bencoolen; being the first attempt of the kind ever made by Europeans, and finally I had to proceed to Bengal to report my proceedings and to confer with the Governor General as to what was best to be done to check the further progress of the Dutch. Here I fortunately met with every attention; the subject was fairly and deliberately considered, and to use the emphatic words of Lord Hastings "there was but one opinion as to the moral turpitude of the means employed by our rivals and their determination to degrade and injure the British. In this crisis it remained to be considered what was best to be done in this country without exciting actual hostilities; and what should be recommended to the authorities in Europe. It was clear that the object of the Dutch was not only to command for themselves all the trade of the Eastern Islands, but to possess the power in the event of future war of preventing our regular intercourse with China.

* *Menangkabau*; an interesting account of this visit is to be found in Crawfurd's Descriptive Dictionary p. 273.

By possessing the only passes to this Empire, namely the Straits of Sunda and Malacca, they had it in their power at all times to impede that trade; and of their disposition to exert this power, even in time of peace, there was no doubt. It was therefore determined that we should lose no time in securing, if practicable, the command of one of these Straits; and the Straits of Malacca on account of their proximity to our other Settlements appeared the most eligible. I was accordingly authorized to provide for the establishment of the British interests at Achceu. (the most Northern Kingdom of Sumatra and which commands the Northern entrance of these Straits) and to fix upon some Station that might equally command the southern entrance. My negotiations occupied a period of several months, but they ended successfully, and the predominance of the British influence in that quarter has been duly provided for. The same has been effected at this end of the Straits and the intermediate station of Malacea although occupied by the Dutch, has been completely nullified.

This decisive though moderate policy on the part of the British Government has paralysed the further efforts of the Dutch, and we have reason to hope that every thing will remain *in statu quo* pending the references which are necessarily made to Europe by both parties. Our eventual object is of course to secure the independence of the Bornean, Sumatra and other States with which we have been in alliance for the last twenty years; and further, if practicable to regain the Settlements of Malacea, Padang and Banca. These ought never to have been transferred to the Dutch, but as they are indebted to us in nearly a Million Sterling on the adjustment of their Java accounts, it is to be hoped we may yet make a compromise for their return.

I shall say nothing of the importance which I attach to the permanence of the position I have taken up at Singapore; it is a child of my own. But for my Malay studies I should hardly have known that such a place existed; not only the European but the Indian world also was ignorant of it. It is impossible to conceive a place combining more advantages: it is within a week's sail of China, still closer to Siam, Cochin-China, &c. in the very heart of the Archipelago, or as the Malays call it, it is "the Navel of the Malay countries"; already a population of above five thousand souls has collected under our flag, the number is daily increasing, the harbour, in every way superior, is filled with Shipping from all quarters; and although our Settlement has not been

established more than four months every one is comfortably housed, provisions are in abundance, the Troops healthy, and every thing bears the appearance of content and abundance. I am sure you will wish me success, and I will therefore only add that if my plans are confirmed at home, it is my intention to make this my principal residence, and to devote the remaining years of my residence in the East, to the advancement of a Colony which in every way in which it can be viewed bids fair to be one of the most important, and at the same time one of the least expensive and troublesome, that we possess. Our object is not territory but trade, a great commercial Emporium, and a *fulcrum* whence we may extend our influence politically, as circumstances may hereafter require. By taking immediate possession we put a negative to the Dutch claim of exclusion, and at the same time revive the drooping confidence of our allies and friends; one Free Port in these Seas must eventually destroy the spell of Dutch monopoly; and what Malta is in the West, that may Singapore become in the East.

I shall leave this for Bencoolen in a few days, where I hope to remain quietly until we hear decidedly from Europe, at all events I am not likely to quit Sumatra again for some months and then only for a short period to revisit my new Settlement. You may judge of our anxiety to return to Bencoolen when I tell you that we left our little girl there in August last, and have not since seen her. Lady Raffles, who accompanied me to Bengal and is now with me, has since presented me with a son; the circumstances preceding his birth were not very propitious; I was obliged to quit her only four days before the event, we were almost amongst strangers, no nurse in whom to confide, no experienced medical aid, for we had expected to reach Bencoolen in time, and yet all went on well, and a finer babe or one with more promise of intelligence never was beheld. You will recollect that our little girl was born on the waves, under circumstances not more promising, and yet no mother and no children could have suffered less. What strange and uncertain dispensations of Providence! Good God when I think of Claremont and all the prospects which were there anticipated,—but I must check my pen.

I thank you most sincerely for your letters of the 8th December 1817 and 29th April, 1819; the former I could never acknowledge till now; the latter is before me and I cannot express how much I feel indebted to you for your kind and affectionate attention. The engravings I have

duly received; one of them in particular is dear to me from many associations; it is from the Painting which I so often admired in the Drawing-room.

Your account of our amiable and invaluable Prince has given me the greatest satisfaction. He has indeed had his trials, but that he is himself again proves him to be of a higher being than our ordinary natures. Volumes would not do justice to his merits or his virtues, my heart overflows when I think of him and of his sufferings, and though far removed and separated from the passing scene, be assured I listen with no common interest to all that is said of and about him.

I have told you that Lady Raffles has presented me with a son and a daughter; from the circumstance of the latter having been born on the voyage, the Javanese who are a poetic people, wished her to be named Tunjung Segâra, meaning ‘Lotos of the Sea,’ and a more appropriate name for purity or innocence could not have been conceived. I gratified their wish, but at the same time my own, by prefixing a more Christian and a more consecrated name “Charlotte”; my son has been christened “Leopold”; and thus will “Leopold and Charlotte” be commemorated in my domestic circle, as names ever dear and ever respected; and that of my daughter will be associated with the emblem of purity, handed down in remembrance of one whose virtues and interests will never be forgotten.

I must not close this letter without giving you some account of my occupations and views as far as they are of a personal nature; I am vain enough to hope that these will interest you more than all I could write of a public or political nature.

Notwithstanding the serious demands on my time arising out of my public station, and the discussion I have naturally had with the Dutch Authorities, I have been able to advance very considerably in my collections in Natural History. Sunatra does not afford any of those interesting remains of former civilisation, and of the arts, which abound in Java. Here man is far behind-hand, perhaps a thousand years even behind his neighbour the Javanese; but we have more originality, and the great volume of Nature has hardly been opened. I was extremely unfortunate in the death of Dr. Arnold, who accompanied me as a Naturalist from England, he fell a sacrifice to his zealous and indefatigable exertions on the first journey he made into the interior; but not until

he immortalized his name by the discovery of one of the greatest prodigies in nature that has been yet met with, a flower of great beauty but more remarkable for its dimensions; it measures a full yard across, weighs fifteen pounds, and contains in the Nectary no less than eight pints, each petal being 11 inches in breadth and there being five of them. I sent a short description of this plant, with a drawing and part of the flower itself, to Sir Joseph Banks; from whom, or some of the members of the Royal Society, you may probably have heard more particulars. I have now with me as a Botanist Dr. Jaik, a gentleman highly qualified, and we are daily making very important additions to our Herbarium. We have recently discovered at this place some very beautiful species of the *Nepenthes* or Pitcher Plant, which in elegance and brilliancy far surpass any thing I have yet seen in this quarter—the plant is very remarkable, and though the genus has been generally described but little is known of the different species. We are now engaged in making drawings of them, with a few other of the most remarkable and splendid productions of the vegetable world which we have met with, and propose forming them into a volume to be engraved in Europe. This will be an earnest of what we propose to do hereafter, and you will oblige me much by informing me whether His Serene Highness would have any objection to the first result of our labours being dedicated to him; there will not be above six or eight engravings, but they will be on a large scale.

Besides our Botanical pursuits I have in my family two French naturalists, one of them step-son to the celebrated Cuvier; their attention is principally directed to Zoology, but we include in our researches every thing that is interesting in the mineral kingdom; our collection of Birds is already very extensive, and in the course of two or three years we hope to complete our more important researches in Sumatra. We shall endeavour to include the Malay Peninsula, Borneo and elsewhere, wherever the Dutch, who are the Vandals of the East, do not establish themselves to our exclusion. I hope the plants &c. by Dr. Horsfield reached Claremont in safety and tolerable preservation.

On the West Coast of Sumatra abound great varieties of Asallims and Madrepores; but few of these are known in England, and collections are rare. I am preparing a few for Claremont and shall be happy to hear from you if they are likely to be acceptable, or what would be more so. I beg of

you to present my respects to Prince Leopold with every assurance of deep regard, affection, and esteem which it may be respectful for me to offer.

To the Duke of Kent, (although I have not the honor of his acquaintance I am personally known to his Royal Highness) I will thank you also to present my respects, and my congratulations, as well on his marriage as his appointment of Commander-in-Chief, which we learn by the Public Prints has recently taken place.

Allow me to add my kindest remembrances to Sir Robert Gardiner, the Baron Dr. Stockmar, and other members of the family or visitors to whom I may have the honor of bring known and who are kind enough to take an interest in my welfare; and to assure you, my dear friend, that I am with sincerity and truth,

Your obliged and

very faithfully attached friend,

(Signed) T. S. RAFFLES.